

## THE PROPORTION OF THE RAGUSAN NOBILITY AT THE CLOSING OF THE MAJOR COUNCIL IN 1332

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**ABSTRACT:** The process of the 'closing' of the Venetian Major council (the *serrata*) started in 1297 and ended in 1323. The Major Council of Dubrovnik closed thirty-five years later, in 1332. The Ragusans followed the Venetian model, although their motive was primarily to prevent the 'natural' inflow into the noble ranks. Analysis of Dubrovnik's population structure at the time of the council's closing in 1332 shows that prior to the closing of the council the Ragusan patrician circle included a significant portion of the population. The portion of the nobility in the overall city population was around 40%, the rest being composed of the first-generation immigrants (*habitatores*), marginal and other lower social groups. The descendants of the newcomers managed to rise to a higher rank (*cives*) without much hindrance, and win their noble status (*nobiles*) by being admitted into the council membership. In this way the portion of nobility in the overall population managed to retain its high level over a longer period of time. It was not until the closing of the Major Council that the nobility became the elite in the true sense. A once fluid circle had become conserved, 'rise' of commoners towards nobility had become impossible.

**Key words:** Dubrovnik Republic, Venice, closing of the council, *serrata*, nobility

### *The roots of Ragusan nobility*

The origin of the Ragusan city nobility, which accumulated considerable wealth in trade, is closely associated with institutional development. Urbanisation contributed to the city dynamics, introducing greater regulation and monopolisation

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of decision-making. Thus the prerequisites for the stratification of the population on the level of property ownership and administration were created. The outcome of that development on the organisational (government) and status (nobility) level would depend on the everyday life needs, tradition and external influence.

Today there is no doubt that Dubrovnik had been founded well before the fall of Epidaurum as a stop on the ancient sea route. With the destruction of Epidaurum, Dubrovnik took over the role of the local centre. According to Zdenka Janeković-Römer, “the division of the communal population into *cives* and *populus*, along with the institution of the assembly and the council, are the residues of the Roman municipal tradition”.<sup>1</sup> The administrative organisation of Dubrovnik had its roots both in antiquity and Byzantium,<sup>2</sup> leaving open the question of its autochthony,<sup>3</sup> and to what extent it owed to the tradition of Epidaurum. “Porphyrogenitus’ list of the distinguished residents of Epidaurum who moved to Ragusa, coupled by the tradition of some Ragusan noble families”—according to Zdenka Janeković-Römer—“provide ground for speculation on the role of these newcomers in the shaping of the early-medieval city organisation and the genesis of the patriciate”<sup>4</sup> and, with reservations about the possibility that the Ragusan tradition might have also followed the ‘general trends’ of the many European towns, in an attempt to “establish its origin in an undisputed noble tradition”,<sup>5</sup> allows “the assumption that the surviving Epidaurum families did form the core of the original elite, later buttressed by distinguished Slavic families arriving from the hinterland”.<sup>6</sup>

With time, the administration system tended to adapt to new circumstances. Ludwig Steindorff thus argues that the Dalmatian communes (including that of Dubrovnik), which he defines as “a union of individuals based on common oath”, emerged as a result of the influence of the north Italian cities in the eleventh and twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> “The myth of sovereignty, inherent in the municipality by the will

<sup>1</sup> Zdenka Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode. Dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1999: p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this point, see: Jadran Ferluga, *Vizantiska uprava u Dalmaciji*. Beograd: Vizantološki institut SAN, 1957: pp. 7-119. On the nobility in Italy during Byzantine rule, see: Vera von Falkenhausen, »A Provincial Aristocracy: the Byzantine Provinces in Southern Italy (9th-11th Century)«, in: *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold. Oxford: B.A.R., 1984: pp. 211-235.

<sup>3</sup> What exactly preceded the fall of Epidaurum? Was it large enough and powerful enough to have developed its own nobility? Although too little is known about the city’s earliest history to have a quality discussion on this topic, this possibility, however, should not be disregarded.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Steindorff, »Stari svijet i novo doba. O formiranju komuna na istočnoj obali Jadrana«. *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 16 (1986): pp. 141-142.

of its citizens and for this reason vested with supreme authority”, however, is the result of the fact that Dubrovnik, like the other Dalmatian communes, was not granted “sovereignty by the pope or secular rulers, but attained it though the gradual withering of the Byzantine rule and the shift of power to autonomous municipal bodies”.<sup>8</sup>

### *The transformation of cives into nobiles*

The stratification of the Ragusan population developed spontaneously, two components being essential: the relationship between the wealthy and the poor (*cives* vs. *populus*), and the relationship towards newcomers as potential pretenders to property (*populus* and *cives* vs. *habitatores* and *forenses*). These two relations were solved in different ways.

The *cives*—*populus* relationship developed with the advancement of the administration, establishment of councils in which the *cives* achieved domination. This relationship tended to polarise with time. The citizen stratum (*cives*) evolved towards the nobility, while the *populus*, excluded from political institutions, remained on the level which ‘services’ the city and facilitates its communal functioning (artisans, soldiers, servants etc.), or joined the marginal groups.

The attitude of *populus* and *cives* towards foreigners and newcomers (*forenses* and *habitatores*), however, was dealt with by discriminatory rules. The lowest level of differentiation was inevitably based on fear of newcomers and their possible usurpation of the rights claimed by the natives. Those born in the city, who considered themselves the upholders of its tradition, raised a ‘barrier’ against the aliens who intended to settle in the city for good. The path from foreigner to citizen led through assimilatory mechanisms, with the possibility of skipping certain status levels. The citizen status may have been earned by a special deed or contribution to the public good, on the basis of property, or marriage with a woman from a citizen rank. The smaller the city, the easier the path from foreigner to citizen, which manifested in the newcomer’s inclusion in decision-making and the possibility of participating in the assembly (*zbor*).

The city’s development further complicated the administrative pattern. Decision-making on the citizens’ *zbor* became inefficient, and resulted in yet another division of the *cives*: into those who, thanks to ability, honour or wealth, were entrusted with governing, and those who were not. This ‘ruling’ citizen rank had gradually shaped into nobility (*nobiles*).

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<sup>8</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: p. 57.

The exact date of the founding of the Ragusan councils is not known. But it is quite certain that the final political structure (Count, *Consilium Rogatorium*, Minor Council and Major Council) was not created on one occasion but was the result of development through a number of stages. Judging by the sources, the subjectivity of the whole *populus* is confirmed until the end of the twelfth century. According to a document from the mid-eleventh century, the Lokrum monastery, with the consent of the whole *populus* (*ex consensu omni populo*) was granted an estate bequeathed to it by priest Dominik.<sup>9</sup> In 1169 an agreement with Pisa was signed between the *consules* and the whole *populus* of the City of Dubrovnik (the Pisa representatives addressed *consulibus et universo populo supradicte civitatis Ragusii*).<sup>10</sup> Thus one may assume that by that time the Major Council had not been founded yet, and that the popular assembly played the role of the general political body consisting of both nobles and non-nobles, that is, the representatives of all the inhabitants and of the clergy.<sup>11</sup>

According to a tradition recorded by the Ragusan chroniclers Anonymous<sup>12</sup> and Ragnina,<sup>13</sup> differentiation among the citizens took place after the year 743, when a larger group of Vlachs, among whom was a certain member of the Pecorario family known as *chatunar grande*, fleeing from the tyranny of King Radoslav, arrived from Bosnia with considerable property.<sup>14</sup> The rich newcomers arrived “with a sizeable party and livestock, and immense treasure in gold and silver. To the city they introduced their customs, festivals and feasts, and ruled *a modo della nation Bosnese*, in the Bosnian manner”, keeping princely appearance, each of them having “his own majordomo and an army of servants”. They divided the “present population into nobles, *populus* and servants. Among the *populus*, higher positions were occupied by the newly arrived parties: *naredbenici* (commanders), *knežaci*, guards, equerries and falconers”.<sup>15</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> Josip Lučić, *Povijest Dubrovnika od VII stoljeća do godine 1205*. Dubrovnik: Historijski institut JAZU u Dubrovniku, 1973: p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> *Diplomatički zbornik Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije*, II, ed. Tadija Smičiklas. Zagreb: JAZU, 1904: p. 124; J. Lučić, *Povijest Dubrovnika od VII stoljeća do godine 1205*: p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> On the participation of clergy in the government, see: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 57-59, passim.

<sup>12</sup> »Li Annali della nobilissima repubblica di Ragusa«, in: *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*, ed. Speratus Nodilo. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, XIV]. Zagabriae: JAZU, 1883: pp. 8-9, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolò Ragnina, »Annali di Ragusa«, in: *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: pp. 180-181, 183.

<sup>14</sup> »Li Annali della nobilissima repubblica di Ragusa«: p. 8. See. Milorad Medini, *Starine dubrovačke*. Dubrovnik: Štamparija Jadran, 1935: p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: p. 47.

kind of social stratification, which suggests that the division “came from the outside”, has been observed by Zdenka Janeković-Römer, as it “really reminds of the hierarchies shaped in the early-medieval Balkan states”, but rightly adds that “accent should be placed on the wealth of these newcomers that eventually gave rise to social division”.<sup>16</sup> In other words: if one attempts to read the true core of this tradition (date, of course, being more than questionable), *modo della nation Bosnese* and the very migration from Bosnia should not be in the main focus but the fact that the city developed as a conglomeration of the old Roman and the newly arrived Slav population, in which both these elements experienced stratification.

Nobles (*nobiles*) are first mentioned in a document from 1023,<sup>17</sup> but this stratum probably existed well before the first written evidence, since there existed all the prerequisites for its formation. Dubrovnik’s territorial expansion to Astarea and the Elaphite Islands by the middle of the tenth century provided the basis for land ownership. On the other hand, the city itself had grown to such an extent that the government based on the participation of all the people was no longer efficient. Original organisation, based on two main levels—the city assembly and governor as head, must have laid the foundations of yet another body well before 1023—a council which would prepare and execute the decisions of the city assembly (*zbor*). The political development probably unfolded “step by step”, starting with the shaping of one body vested with political, administrative and judicial functions (*consules*),<sup>18</sup> which, with the city’s growth, became overburdened, leading in due course to the separation of the three responsibilities. Most important decisions were passed on the *Consilium Rogatorum* (a body consisting of the wise men, *sapientes*), and on the operational level were prepared by the Minor Council as the most important governing body. The judges were to be elected separately, and with time the domain of their responsibilities began to render a legal rather than political or administrative character.<sup>19</sup> The final step was marked by the

<sup>16</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lučić, *Povijest Dubrovnika od VII stoljeća do godine 1205.*: p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> For the development of consulates in Italy in the eleventh century and in the Dalmatian communes, see: Tomislav Raukar, »Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XIV stoljeću«. *Historijski zbornik* 33-34 (1980-1981): pp. 169-170; Željko Radić, »Neki aspekti kontrole upravitelja srednjovjekovnih gradova, s osvrtom na splitsko statutarno pravo«. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu* 42 (2005): pp. 186-187.

<sup>19</sup> A similar development has also been suggested by Vinko Foretić: “In the earlier centuries judicial and administrative matters were the responsibility of the Minor Council members, judges being termed in Latin as *judices* and *consules*. Later the judiciary separated from the administration, but the judges retained their former titles” (Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808*, vol. I. Zagreb: NZMH, 1980: p. 151).

shaping of the Major Council or a reduced form of the city assembly, since it no longer included the representatives of all the city households, but merely those of the elite.<sup>20</sup> However, the “popular assembly” managed to survive until the end of the fourteenth century (last mentioned in 1394), and participated in the referendums on some of the most important issues (e.g. confirmation of the 1272 Statute).<sup>21</sup>

One of the major institutional reforms was conducted after the Venetians had gained suzerainty over Dubrovnik in 1205. Venice gradually exercised full control of the election of the highest government bodies. The count’s position was held by a Venetian. According to the Statute from 1272, from among the men “born and descended from the City of Dubrovnik”, the count appointed his deputy, five judges and six members of the Minor Council. The latter, however, together with the count, appointed all other officials, as well as the members of the Major Council.<sup>22</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that the city administration developed along parallel lines, which did not coincide with the rise of the nobility. Namely, the city administration expanded in correlation with real life, following the city’s growing needs for efficient organisation. The forming of the nobility, however, was but a personal status consequence, demarcation of ‘power territory’, and cementing of the acquired rights. While the administrative organisation rendered the present, the development of the nobility lagged behind the administrative development by sanctioning the past situation. Tradition thus played an essential role in the nobility’s development, which tended to ‘draw on’ ancient rights rather than the current ones. In this light one should also view the Epidaurum tradition with some of the later established noble families, which suggests that the core of the noble families owes its structure to the refugees from the ancient Epidaurum. This, however, we cannot know with exactitude. It is plausible that the nobility emerged somewhat later, after the institution of the first council, most likely in the eighth century (as tradition has it), ninth or even tenth century, when the appointment (or election) into the council may have provided also the formal ground for noble legitimacy. Given the mobility within the city assembly, into which originally the representatives of the *populus* were also included, appointed (or elected) into the council could also be the members of the families which

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<sup>20</sup> On the development and functioning of the Major Council in Split, see: Tomislav Raukar, »‘Consilium generale’ i sustav vladanja u Splitu u XIV stoljeću«. *Historijski zbornik* 37 (1984): pp. 87-103.

<sup>21</sup> V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> *The Statute of Dubrovnik*, trans. and ed. Vesna Rimac, Vesna Baće and Nella Lonza. Dubrovnik: Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2012: I, 3. See also V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: p. 122.



settled in the city after the Epidaurum destruction. Thus in the very beginning the whole of Dubrovnik's population had access to the nobility. Within it, most probably, a portion did originate from the descendants of the Epidaurum refugees, who, in turn, considered that fact of major status relevance, on the basis of which they claimed certain precedence over those who settled in Dubrovnik after them.

Doubtless the power of the elite mounted with time, and before the closing of the council in the fourteenth century the rise from *cives* to *nobiles* was not impossible. The transition did not involve legal mechanisms, but tended to be dictated by everyday life practice. A citizen might have become a nobleman once he, as representative of his *casata*, was allowed access to administrative positions.

There is reason to believe that at the time of the council's closure in 1332, when 'access' of citizens to nobility had become impossible, the noble circle represented a very large proportion of the population of Dubrovnik. It is estimated that in 1300,<sup>23</sup> the nobility included 1,675 persons, that is, the noble households (servants included) had about 2,500 people (Table 1). According to Krivošić's estimate calculated on the basis of the size of the urban space, which I hold realistic, by the end of the thirteenth century Dubrovnik had about 3,500 inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> The first half of the fourteenth century was marked by positive demographic trends

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<sup>23</sup> An estimate of the nobility's size owes greatly to the very rich sources of the Dubrovnik State Archives, the preserved long-term series of marriage agreements (*Pacta matrimonialia*), dowry books (*Libri dotium*), wills (*Testamenta Notariae*) and the list of office-holders known as the *Specchio*, as well as parish registers which, due to the destruction of the bishop's palace in a fire during the great earthquake of 1667 where they were kept, had become accessible not earlier than the second half of the seventeenth century. These source materials have offered quality basis for genealogical reconstruction and a realistic estimate of the *casate*, but also estimate of the nobility's size in 50-year intervals from 1300 to 1800. The estimates were subject to corrections because of genealogical gaps. Persons omitted by genealogical registration are: a) a small portion of male patricians who had entered the clergy before entry into the Major Council, and who were not registered in any other archival source, in addition to a few single patricians from the period before the establishment of the *Specchio* books in 1440; b) a certain number of unregistered single noble women who were either not mentioned in their parents' or brothers' will, or whose parents never drafted a will, and who, at the same time, were not registered in any other archival source, and c) children who died in childhood and whose death remained unregistered because, for instance, they died before their parents drafted a will, as well as a proportion of the surviving children who later never married and who remained undetected in other sources. For more on the estimate and correction methods, see Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, book 1: *Korijeni, struktura i kretanje vlasteoskih rodova kroz stoljeća*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Stjepan Krivošić, *Stanovništvo Dubrovnika i demografske promjene u prošlosti*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti JAZU u Dubrovniku, 1990: p. 51.

until 1348, when they were interrupted by an outbreak of plague. At the time of the Council's closing in 1332, the noble circle probably numbered more than 1,700 persons, the noble households having around 2,700 people, while the population of the city itself may have approached or even reached the figure of 4,000.

Table 1. Estimate of the total number of the nobility and the total number of the members of noble households in 50-year intervals (1300-1800) on the basis of genealogical analysis

Year	Number of <i>casate</i> (households)	Number of patricians	Number of persons living in patrician households (patricians + servants)
1300	253	1,675	2,512
1350	239	1,303	1,954
1400	128	907	1,452
1450	245	1,515	2,576
1500	331	1,963	3,337
1550	267	1,565	2,661
1600	229	1,234	2,222
1650	128	699	1,258
1700	83	420	798
1750	71	388	737
1800	72	314	628

Source: Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. I: *Korijeni, struktura i kretanje vlasteoskih rodova kroz stoljeća*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2011: Tables 39 and 43.

These figures show that at the time of the council's closure the noble circle exceeded 40% of the whole population. If we add the servants (slaves), 2/3 of the inhabitants lived in the noble households. The remaining 1/3 of the population consisted of bakers, butchers, shoemakers, tailors and other artisans, merchants, mariners, guards (*zduri*) and soldiers (*soldati*), a few physicians or *speziali*, mainly the first generation of the new settlers (*habitatores*),<sup>25</sup> who had not yet

<sup>25</sup> On the basis of later Ragusan sources, genealogical method unquestionably confirms that the term *habitante*, without exception, was used to denote an immigrant. By analogy, the term *habitor* in the sources from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century probably conveys the same meaning. *Habitor* is actually a foreigner who had acquired residence. His descendant (if born in Dubrovnik) would be *civis*, never to be termed as *habitor*.



acquired the status of citizen. In other words: the Ragusan noble circle virtually included all the citizens (*cives*) of Dubrovnik.

In order to get a better grasp of these relations, I will draw a parallel with the population structure of Dubrovnik in 1817, when the City of Dubrovnik had 5,598 inhabitants. Out of this number 2,749 (49.10%) were born in Dubrovnik, while 2,849 (50.90%) were immigrants (Table 2).<sup>26</sup> In 'medieval' terminology: 50.90% of the population belonged to the immigrant group (*habitatores*). The rest or 49.10% of the inhabitants were citizens (*cives*), but also (underage) immigrant descendants who could not yet acquire the citizen status. Therefore, had the council been closed in 1817, and had it included all Ragusan citizens as determined by the 'medieval' criterion, the proportion of 40% of the total population of Dubrovnik at the time could hardly have been attained.

Table 2. Population structure of Dubrovnik in 1817 by place of birth

Origin	Place of birth		
	Total	Men	Women
<i>Total</i>	5,598	2,403	3,195
Born in Dubrovnik	2,749	1,292	1,457
Immigrants	4,332	1,777	2,555

Source: *Popolazione del Circolo di Ragusa dell'anno 1817*. Okružno poglavarstvo 1817, no. 1239 (State Archives of Dubrovnik).

What does this actually signify? Considering that the Ragusan nobility, notably according to Ragusan terminology, had existed at least three (or possibly five) centuries before the closing of the council, the proportion of over 40% of the members of the patrician circle may be accounted in two ways only: Dubrovnik either functioned as a village with an insignificant fluctuation of inhabitants and poor adaptation prospects of the new arrivals, whereby population growth relied solely on domestic resources,<sup>27</sup> or, the nobility remained open to anyone who had acquired Ragusan citizenship, facilitating the rank's renewal through quick adaptation of the newly arrived clans. What other explanation can there be for such a high proportion of noble blood in the gross population? Although

<sup>26</sup> *Popolazione del Circolo di Ragusa dell'anno 1817*. Okružno poglavarstvo 1817, no. 1239 (State Archives of Dubrovnik).

<sup>27</sup> On modest fluctuation of rural population, see for instance: Nenad Vekarić, *Stanovništvo poluotoka Pelješca*, vol. I. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1992: pp. 55-59.

rural elements were present in Dubrovnik's earliest history (e.g. the legend of the arrival of the Pecorario clan with considerable livestock), I believe that the reasons for such a high proportion of noble elements should not be sought in that direction but in the accessibility to local functions, that is, in the fundamental identification of the Ragusan citizenry (*cives*) with the Ragusan nobility (*nobiles*).

Indeed, a difference, albeit a very narrow one, separated *cives* from *nobiles*. The criterion by which a citizen could attain a noble status we do not know with certainty, but there is a lot of ground for assumption. A citizen who managed to enter the council most probably attained the noble status. From that moment on, the Ragusans no longer addressed him as citizen but as nobleman. Here, however, one ought to bear in mind that noble status was not a prerequisite for council membership. The right to participate in political power was vested in each citizen, while the exercise of that right distinguished him as nobleman. Put differently: the status of citizen (not a nobleman at the same time) was short. It merely included the period necessary for a son of a newcomer (*habitor*) to become the head and representative of his own *casata* (household) and as such enter the council—that is, far less commonly, when a newcomer, in recognition of certain deeds, was to acquire the status of a Dubrovnik citizen. In confirmation of the fact that the council was not an “exclusive club” but a body of all citizens and heads of all *casate*, in real life *cives* and *nobiles* virtually overlapping, is the division of land on Stonski rat (Pelješac Peninsula) in 1336.

Besides the nobles, citizens also participated in the division of the territories of Astarea, Dubrovačko primorje and Konavle, acquired several decades after the closing of the council. However, in the partition of Stonski rat, which coincided with the closing of the council, only the nobility participated and no citizens (Table 3). Why? The answer is simple: because in 1336 when the land on Stonski rat was being divided, there existed no other citizens apart from the nobles. They all bore a noble status. The only citizen to receive land on Stonski rat, a non-noble, was *Vale de Abram* from Bar (today's Montenegro). In 1320, he was granted Ragusan citizenship (probably in recognition of certain services), but never rose to the noble status because he was a newcomer (*habitor*). Being heirless, the noble status was not subsequently attained.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Valentin de Abran, son of Srd, was granted Ragusan citizenship on 26 February 1320 (Irmgard Mahnken, *Dubrovački patricijat u XIV veku*, I [Posebna izdanja SANU, bk. 340]. Beograd: SANU, 1960: p. 91). In the oldest cadastral register from 1336 he is entered as *Abram Antibaranus* (Josip Lučić, »Najstarija zemljišna knjiga u Hrvatskoj - Dubrovački zemljišnik diobe zemlje u Stonu i Pelješcu iz 1336.«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti IC JAZU u Dubrovniku* 18 (1980): p. 62).

Table 3. Participants of the division of newly acquired territories

Participants in the division of land	Pelješac 1336		Astarea 1366		Dubrovačko primorje 1399		Konavle (Sandalj's part) 1423		Konavle (Pavlović's part) 1427	
	Number of parts	%	Number of parts	%	Number of parts	%	Number of parts	%	Number of parts	%
<i>Total</i>	274	100	238.75	100	290	100	360	100	379.75	100
Nobility	267.50	97.63	178.50	74.76	236.25	81.47	283.50	78.75	304.50	80.18
Non-noble branches of noble families	1.00	0.37	6.50	2.72	6.50	2.24	6.75	1.88	6.50	1.71
Citizens and <i>populus</i> of Dubrovnik	0.50	0.18	52.50	21.99	43.50	15.00	42.75	11.88	42.50	11.19
Local population	5.00	1.82	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00
Foreign lords	-	0.00	-	0.00	3.75	1.29	1.25	0.35	12.50	3.29
Municipality of Dubrovnik	-	0.00	1.25	0.52	-	0.00	15.75	4.38	3.75	0.99
Church	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	10.00	2.78	10.00	2.63

Note: 22 parts on the Pelješac Peninsula, the owners of which have not been identified, have been omitted from analysis.

Source: Nenad Vekarić, *Pelješka naselja u 14. stoljeću*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti JAZU u Dubrovniku, 1989: pp. 20-25; Josip Lučić, »Stjecanje, dioba i borba za očuvanje Dubrovačkog primorja 1399-1405.« *Arhivski vjesnik* 11-12 (1968-1969): pp. 158-181; *Libro negro del Astarea*, ed. Ante Marinović. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 2005: pp. 43-62; *Libro rosso*, ser. 12 (Cathastichum), vol. 4 (State Archives of Dubrovnik).

In confirmation of this opinion is the analysis of the citizens gathered in the confraternity of St Anthony (the so-called *Antunini*). All the families of this circle, apart from those who belonged to the old nobility and had later, for some reason, lost their noble status (e.g. Dersa, Maxio, Menze), had settled in Dubrovnik after the closing of the council. Why among them were there no families who had arrived before the council's closure? Because these earlier

settled clans, through the mechanisms described above, had entered the noble circle. Those who arrived later, although the nobility's equals in wealth and prestige, could not filter into the closed noble circle in the way they might have had if they had arrived a century before. The confraternity of St Anthony was actually founded as a form of substitute or 'spare nobility', sanctioning the reality in conformity with the new rules. In other words: had the council not been closed, that confraternity would probably never have been founded, and the *Antunini* circle would have been included in the patriciate.

*Closing of the council: the transformation of 'nobiles' into nobiles*

Differentiation between the Ragusan nobility and citizens on the terminological level is an issue of lesser importance. If we follow the heart of the matter, Ragusan nobility in the true sense may be said to have existed from the closing of the council. It was then that the nobility became determined by the attribution of exclusiveness, shaping into genuine elite. Before the council's closure, Dubrovnik was inhabited by the citizenry (citizens with political rights who could participate in the administration) and *populus* (inhabitants, mainly newly settled, who had not yet acquired their political rights). With the closing of the council yet another stratum entered the social scene, so that thence three classes may be distinguished: nobility (citizens with political rights), citizenry (citizens who, on the basis of reputation and wealth, would with time attain a status similar to the citizenry before the council's closure but with no access to political power, later to be substituted by the membership of St Anthony's confraternity), and *populus*, upon whom the closing of the council had no effect.<sup>29</sup> Or, respecting the terminology of the old Ragusans: Ragusan nobility existed also before the closing of the council as an open rank which absorbed the bulk of the population. After the council's closure, a once fluid circle grew hermetic, exclusive, increasingly losing the natural biological potential and as a result, in the long run, created the conditions for its own downfall.

The third phase of the development of the Ragusan nobility, therefore, was marked by the closing of the council on 12 May 1332, a year prior to the acquisition of the Pelješac Peninsula. It was then that on the Minor Council three "wise men" were chosen: Marin Binčola, son of Šimun (c. 1270–c. 1339),

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<sup>29</sup> On this also see: T. Raukar, »Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XIV stoljeću«: pp. 180–183.

Junije Dersa, son of Junije (c. 1267-1348) and Martol Čereva, son of Marin (c. 1295-1349) to make a list of all the current members sitting on the Major Council, as well as non-members worthy of that position.<sup>30</sup> The previous decision passed on the same day, by which the members of the Major Council were forbidden to trade in meat, contains the criterion for earning the position on that list: all those whose father or grandfather had been or was on the Major Council.<sup>31</sup>

According to Irmgard Mahnken, that was the moment which marked the closing of the Major Council.<sup>32</sup> Nedeljković, however, argues that the decisions brought in 1332 cannot be considered constitutional, claiming that the Ragusan Major Council was closed between 1319 and 1324, most certainly before 1325. Nedeljković's conclusion rests on the fact that, according to the preserved sources, the members of the Major Council were last appointed in September 1319, and since the books of the *Reformationes* series for the period 17 June 1320 to 17 June 1325 are not extant, we can only speculate whether that election was really the last (or it might have been followed by another several years later). The main reasons underlying the closing of the council Nedeljković pinpoints in the mounting power of the local government against the Venetian count, who until then appointed the council members. The very passing of the decision on the council's closure implied annulment of the members' appointment, as their eligibility to council rested on certain automatism. The decision from 1332, according to Nedeljković, is in fact the decision on the expansion of the already closed council.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Die XII. madii... Item in eodem minori consilio captum fuit et deliberatum, quod debeant eligi III boni homines ad scribendum et reducendum in scriptis omnes qui ad presens sunt de maiori consilio, et alios qui videbuntur eis fore dignos esse de maiori consilio... - Fuerunt electi supra predictis: - Marinus de Binçola, Junius Derse et Martolus de Čereva (Monumenta Ragusina /hereafter: MR/. Libri reformationum, II, ed. Josephus Gelcich. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, XIII]. Zagrabiae: 1882: p. 349).*

<sup>31</sup> *...quod nulli qui sint de maiori consilio, vel quorum patres seu avi fuissent vel sint in maiori consilio, possint facere becariam de aliquibus bestiis, vel standum ad bancum ubi venduntur carnes ad recipiendum denarios ex carnibus que venduntur... (Monumenta Ragusina /hereafter: MR/. Libri reformationum, V, ed. Josephus Gelcich. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, XXIX]. Zagrabiae: 1897: p. 349).*

<sup>32</sup> I. Mahnken, *Dubrovački patricijat u XIV veku* I: pp. 34, 85. See also: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 62-63.

<sup>33</sup> Branislav M. Nedeljković, »Nekolike karakteristike i opaske o dubrovačkom pravu i državi XIV i XV stoleća (1358-1460)«. *Istorijski časopis* 18 (1971): p. 105.

Although Nedeljković's argumentation stands to reason, apparently, he has overlooked one detail because of which I consider the 1332 decision to be constitutive. Namely, the nobility as defined in the decision by which they were prohibited from trading in meat shows that the council had not yet been closed. That first, truly declarative decision actually indicates that amongst the members of the Major Council were not all those who, on the grounds of the second, constitutive decision of the same date, would become so. The first decision mentions the members of the Major Council along with those whose father or grandfather **was** or **is** among the members. This implies that the admission to the Major Council was not based on class automatism but on appointment. Had it been the former case, with one's father on the Major Council, the son should also sit on the Council. The second decision was designed to incorporate all those outside the Major Council yet worthy of its membership. The first decision merely reveals those worthy to sit on the Major Council: they are those whose father or grandfather were or are its members. Thus the decision from 1332 was not a decision on the expansion of the noble circle, as Nedeljković holds. The decision was not designed to permit into that circle some other families or lineages worthy of such a position, but to embrace the whole of the existing nobility and not only those appointed to it. A commission of three members was assigned to make a full list of the current members of the Major Council as well as those worthy of the position or those whose father or grandfather had been or were on the Council—that is, in reality, adult sons and brothers of the Major Council members, but also children and brothers of the deceased members.

The establishment of this list marked the final closing of the Major Council. At that moment the noble circle became inaccessible to citizens. From then on the transition from *cives* to *nobiles* was no longer dictated by real life, but by legal mechanism. It is from that moment on that we can talk about the Ragusan nobility in the true sense of the word.

In Venice the process of the council's closure started in 1297, thirty-five years before that of Dubrovnik. It ended in 1323. According to older historiography, the essential goal of such a legislative decision was to 'freeze' the leading position of the former elite, 'oligarchy's victory over the people'. Having observed that the Major Council membership doubled, Frederic Lane concludes that the elite incorporated some until then non-noble families. According to Gherardo Ortalli, the closing of the council was devised to achieve both: enlarge the Council by admitting well-off citizen families, and at the same time prevent

the entry of new families on the basis of their future status.<sup>34</sup> Venetian example was followed by the cities on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. In Split the council was closed in 1334, in Trogir in 1340, and in the other Dalmatian towns also during the third and fourth decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

The Ragusans doubtless modelled after Venice,<sup>36</sup> but their fundamental objective was different from that of Venice, should we accept the interpretation of Frederic Lane. The assumption that the closing of the Ragusan council was motivated by the enlargement of the noble circle is beyond discussion, since the Ragusan nobility even without the council's closing fairly quickly absorbed all the wealthier citizens into its circle. The council's closure was primarily aimed at limitation: to prevent the 'natural' inflow into the noble rank. The prevailing circumstances provided a specific reason for the council to be closed at that particular moment. Namely, Stonski rat (Pelješac), albeit not formally acquired, by 1332 was the territory of Dubrovnik. The council's closure was in fact a 'preparation' for the division of the peninsula, an act devised to formalise the criterion for claiming land on the newly acquired territory.

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<sup>34</sup> For a more general discussion on this see: Frederic C. Lane, »The Enlargement of the Great Council of Venice«, in: *Florilegium Historiale: Essays presented to Wallace Ferguson*, ed. John Gordon Rowe and W. H. Stockdale. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971: p. 245; Gerhard Rösch, *Der venezianische Adel bis zur Schliessung des Grossen Rats*. Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1989: pp. 168-184; Gerhard Rösch, »The Serrata of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286-1323«, in: *Venice Reconsidered. The History of Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano. Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000: pp. 67-88; Gherardo Ortalli, »Venedig«, in: *Lexicon des Mittelalters*, vol. VIII. München: Lexma Verlag, 1997: p. 1466. Also see: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 65-66; Maria-Teresa Todesco, »Andamento demografico della nobiltà veneziana allo specchio delle votazioni nel Maggior Consiglio«. *Ateneo Veneto* 176 (1989): pp. 7-9; Dorit Raines, »Cooptazione, aggregazione e presenza al Maggior Consiglio: le casate del patriziato veneziano, 1297-1797«. *Storia di Venezia - Rivista* 1 (2003): pp. 6-8 and passim.

<sup>35</sup> T. Raukar, »'Consilium generale' i sustav vladanja u Splitu u XIV stoljeću«: pp. 92-94; Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 66-67; Irena Benyovsky Latin, *Srednjovjekovni Trogir. Prostor i društvo*. Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009: p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> According to Nedeljković, the closure of the Ragusan Major Council was an expression of the strengthening of the local government against the Venice-appointed count (B. M. Nedeljković, »Nekolike karakteristike i opaske o dubrovačkom pravu i državi XIV i XV stoljeća (1358-1460)«: p. 105), but this interpretation lacks credibility. The fact that the Venetian count appointed members of the Major Council may have been solved in a much simpler way: by derogating his nomination right, making the closing of the council unnecessary.



## *Conclusion*

The analysis of Dubrovnik's population structure at the time of the council's closure in 1332, the analysis of the partition of Stonski rat (Pelješac Peninsula), acquired in 1333, which corresponds in time with the closing of the council, as well as the time analysis of the arrival of the *Antunini* clans, show that prior to the closing of the council the Ragusan noble circle included a significant portion of the population. The nobility was of the open type and absorbed the whole of citizenry exercising political rights. The proportion of the nobility exceeded 40% of the overall city population, the remainder consisting of the first-generation immigrants (*habitatores*) and marginal groups. The newcomers' descendants managed to rise to a higher status (*cives*) without much hindrance, and by admission to the council attained the noble status (*nobiles*). In this way the proportion of nobility in the overall population managed to retain its high level over a long period of time.

It was not until the closing of the Major Council that the nobility became the elite in the true sense. A once fluid circle had become sealed, the 'access' of citizens to nobility proved impossible. This marked an end to the rank's biological balance, and in the centuries to come resulted in the nobility's depletion and its inevitable downfall.

Translated by Vesna Baće